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# American prisoners of war in Vietnam tell their stories

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UNIVERSITY OF RICHMOND

AMERICAN PRISONERS OF WAR IN VIETNAM TELL THEIR STORIES

HONORS THESIS SUBMITTED TO  
DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

BY  
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RICHMOND, VA

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### **Abstract**

This paper seeks to examine the experiences of Vietnam POWs, both those held in the jungles of South Vietnam and those in the Hanoi prison camps of North Vietnam based on POW narratives consisting of memoirs, autobiographies, and interviews. Early POW history depicts great differences between the two groups of POWs, giving the impression that Pilot POWs, who comprised the majority of prisoners in Hanoi camps, acted more honorably while interned in comparison to enlisted army POWs, who spent the majority of their captivity in the jungles of South Vietnam. This paper demonstrates the similarities in their experiences through these narrative sources and how certain myths regarding their varying performances solidified.

There are two different stories that describe the POW experience in Vietnam. There is the “official story”<sup>1</sup> which focuses largely on the events of Navy and Air force Pilot POWs who spent the majority of captivity within prisons in Hanoi. Additionally, there is the story of enlisted Army or Marine POWs (Jungle POWS) who spent a large part of their imprisonment within the jungles of South Vietnam. In 1973, these 565 American POWs representing various divisions of the armed forces returned home to the United States. The American people, military, and government greeted these men with praises of honor, lauded their courage, and applauded their return as a landmark to the eventual culmination of American involvement in Vietnam. The POWs from Hanoi provided accounts of their experiences within the infamous prison facility nicknamed the “Hanoi Hilton,” emphasizing tremendous leadership, disciplined military resistance, and camaraderie that sustained this group through a horrific ordeal. These returning POWs hailed President Nixon for his war efforts and cited a faith in God, country, and military service that seldom wavered. The POWs who were originally interned within South Vietnam but spent the last two years within Hanoi were silent or muted during the return, and their overtly critical tone towards the Vietnam War and its policy went largely unheard. To the average citizen, the only visible POW who returned to America was the honorable pilot.

The POWs returned to the United States during a tumultuous period filled with antiwar sentiment. Death and destruction in Vietnam mounted considerably during their internment and Americans became restless over the lack of resolution. Nixon’s involvement in the Watergate scandal became increasingly troublesome. Therefore,

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<sup>1</sup> Craig Howes, *Voices of the Vietnam POWs: Witnesses to Their Fight* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 71.

when POWs returned to praise Nixon, who had vowed to end the war four years earlier and was caught in the midst of scandal, and praised the merits of a war against communism that would no doubt be lost, Americans and the press were caught off guard by the POWs' lack of cynicism and the belief that something honorable and purposeful could be found within their service and the Vietnam War itself. Although the POWs from Hanoi were not shocked at the press's critical stance on the war, they were prepared to uphold their ideals of patriotism and challenge any effort that attempted to suggest their struggle was in vain or served little purpose.

These men maintained their experiences exemplified courage, honor, faith, and service for America, qualities their country appeared to have forgotten. Thus, the Pilot POWs embarked on a journey to revive these lost values and steer the country away from this morally ambiguous era while restoring honor to the nation that had lost faith in a government and standard of service these men had not. Through speeches, interviews, essays, and narrative book accounts, Pilot POWs used their experience to teach a positive lesson, which fit perfectly within the government's goal of ending the war honorably. In contrast, the story of those men who were held predominantly within the jungle continued to go largely ignored and, consequently, their beliefs that would counter such idealistic notions went unheard. Eventually, their varying circumstances would be harshly evaluated by standards employed to extol the Pilot POWs.

So began the official story, which Craig Howes, a revisionist to earlier POW history, characterizes as a "history that assigned praise and blame, highlighted or downplayed events, and ultimately transformed a numbingly boring, routine existence

into a rich, significant, orthodox epic.”<sup>2</sup> The official story not only rendered praise for Pilot POWs, but silenced the voice of Jungle POWs, while creating an idealized illusion of what occurred in the prisons of Hanoi in comparison to the jungles of South Vietnam

The development of the official story actually began in 1970 when masses of Pilot POWs throughout Hanoi were brought together in large detention centers collectively referred to by these POWs as Camp Faith or Camp Unity. During this period, days were spent catching up and filling in the gaps of POW history as POWs were able to freely communicate and discuss for the first time their experiences during captivity along with their hopes and fears about homecoming. It became apparent that POWs were apprehensive about their homecoming reception because almost all had given information to the enemy or served as a form of propaganda through tapes, letters, confessions, and antiwar appeals. Accordingly, they began planning their return by addressing issues related to conducting themselves in response to possible accusations. They revealed details of torture that forced their breaking the military’s Code of Conduct, a military document largely created to prevent such behavior, and praised God, country, and military leadership that enabled them to resist against the enemy and keep fighting the war from within their prison cells. Thus, their tailored responses to the media were indicative of a plan that set out, first and foremost, to defend themselves against any charge of collaboration by explaining the minimal amount of information given up under severe mental and physical torture.

Moreover, because President Nixon became increasingly unpopular due to the war dragging on with new bombings and the Watergate scandal, the return of the POWs came to represent a face-saving maneuver for the President’s administration and the

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

policies designed to end the war honorably, ease the wounds of war, and draw attention away from a painful defeat that divided the nation. Hence, the POW return was planned carefully, and principles of forgiveness and return with honor were established long before a POW stepped onto American soil. In return, according to Howes, “POWs did set to work on an agenda similar to Nixon’s; to end the nation’s feelings of failure or guilt over the war by bearing witness to the powers of patriotism and duty.”<sup>3</sup> By doing so, the POWs were not only able to defend their actions, but laud their personal triumphs, and save face for President Nixon, attempting to prove that the Vietnam War and their struggles were not in vain while becoming moral authorities, directing the country towards pride, service, and patriotism.

Because the Hanoi POWs and the government had coinciding agendas, they set about together in representing this official story in essays, interviews, speeches, narratives, and, most definitively, within John G. Hubbell’s *P.O.W.: A Definitive History of the American Prisoner-of-War Experience in Vietnam, 1964-1973*. *P.O.W.*, the most authoritative source of POW literature, aligned itself to the official story in an effort to teach within the pessimistic, post-Vietnam, and now post-Watergate era what America had forgotten. In his foreword, Hubbell introduces *P.O.W.* as “a positive story, above all else a story of great American performance at a time, on her 200<sup>th</sup> birthday, when America needs badly to know how great she still can be.”<sup>4</sup> Hubbell’s motivation lay within not only writing an official defense for Pilot POWs’ performance, but also in

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>4</sup> John G. Hubbell, *P.O.W.: A Definitive History of the American Prisoner-of-War Experience in Vietnam, 1964-1973* (New York: Readers Digest Press, 1976), xiii.

exemplifying their heroic efforts to a standard that Americans should seek to achieve. He cites the virtues that empowered the Pilot POWs to endure the struggle and maintain honor and faith in their country while implicitly demonstrating how the Jungle POWs, in absence of strong leadership and military discipline, failed to measure up to this standard and suffered the consequences. Unfortunately, because this book largely describes the aviators' POW experience and carefully selects, omits, and organizes the material to fit within the above mentioned agenda, ultimately *P.O.W.* harshly evaluates enlisted Jungle POWs through standards developed to glorify the Pilots of Hanoi.<sup>5</sup>

The American Prisoner of War experience and its lessons of virtue continued to be defined largely by pilots held captive in North Vietnam and the official story that began forming while in Camp Unity that became official history with Hubbell's publication. Although these career-minded, college-educated servicemen represented the majority of the 565 American servicemen held captive, their accounts have been largely summarized into *one* collective story that highlights certain POWs while downplaying others, creating the perception of unanimity, and basically ignoring examples that would counter the honorable and patriotic message the official story aimed to send. Consequently, from reading *P.O.W.* and sampling certain essays, interviews, and speeches, there appears to be a clear distinction between the Pilot POWs held captive in Hanoi and the enlisted Army POWs interned within the jungles of South Vietnam. While the Hanoi POWs displayed great resilience in the face of torture, maintained military discipline without accepting early release, communicated to lift morale, and never lost faith in their country and responsibility to defend the free world in a righteous fight against communism, Jungle POWs accepted early release, collaborated with the

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<sup>5</sup> Howes, 217.



Vietnamese without resisting, and in the absence of military officers, allowed discipline to break down resulting in death, cooperation, and even collaboration, while also giving up on their country's responsibility to defend freedom.

However, POW narratives, which consist largely of memoirs, autobiographical books, and taped accounts, the most fundamental primary sources representing POW experiences of both Hanoi and Jungle POWs, embody a different story. While Hanoi POW narratives present numerous elements that fit within the official story, there are also descriptions that cut into the perceived accord between POWs. There are ample examples within these narrative accounts displaying men not living up to the standards of excellence that the official story lauds; men refuse to risk communicating, men cooperate with Vietnamese with little or no resistance, men rationalize their performance within interrogations, and men give antiwar statements in hopes of better treatment or early releases. There are also examples that contradict notions of POW unanimity in terms of camaraderie and discipline; men steal food from each other or deny extra food to the sick; men vent their frustrations on sick people who receive extra food, crying preferential treatment; and men regularly reach breaking points from living in close quarters that result in fist fights.

Moreover, Hanoi narratives indicate that not all men imprisoned believed the Vietnam War was moral or justified, and reveal justifications for the war by narrators who admit to knowing little or nothing about the country of Vietnam and its people. Even among authors of narratives that fall largely within the official story, POWs continually speak of a faith in God and Country that wavers throughout their harrowing experience. Finally, there are other signs indicating that principles of leadership and

military discipline (that POWs hailed themselves for) were largely constructed within Camp Unity before coming home.

Within Jungle POW narratives, elements of the experience Hubbell and the official story criticize are indeed present. There is a lack of leadership and military discipline that may have resulted in resistance breaking down and even death. Men make tapes, sign confessions, and deliver antiwar appeals. Men do turn on each other during tough times when they are devastated by hunger, disease, and depression. Men question the merits of America's involvement in Vietnam. However, the official story does little to explain or distinguish the difference between the conditions that Jungle POWs and Hanoi POWs experienced. Jungle POW narratives clearly demonstrate the fundamental differences in their varying experiences and counter many of the points claimed by the official story. Narratives portray harsher conditions to which Jungle POWs were subjected to. POWs were required to work in the fields to provide themselves with meager shares of food. Malaria and skin disease were prevalent. Dysentery ravaged already weakened bodies. Under such conditions, it was too risky not to cooperate and face possible punishment that would likely result in death on account of an already decimated physical state.

Moreover, the distinction in backgrounds between men imprisoned within Hanoi and the jungle is evident, as Hubbell indicates. The majority of the Jungle POWs were enlisted men without college degrees or career aspirations in the military. But would this fact necessarily mean they would cease resisting and collaborate with the enemy because they did not plan to continue their careers in the military? The official story fails to place these POWs within the context of the Vietnam soldier experience or explain the

remarkable difference regarding exposure to various elements of the war between POWs fighting the ground war and aviators who lacked any substantial contact with the Vietnamese. Jungle narratives show enlisted POWs running often chaotic Search and Destroy missions resulting in American soldiers and Vietnamese civilians dying. Narratives show the ARVN, the American supported South Vietnamese army, doing little or nothing in helping the war effort, while the Vietnamese people, already ravaged by death and destruction, being degraded by American soldiers, creating further resentment of their presence. Resembling the pilots in Hanoi, Jungle POW narratives state these men knew little or nothing about Vietnam, but their experiences came to dictate opinions. Consequently, under different treatment from the South Vietnamese, who were able to undermine any semblance of leadership that had all ready been weakened by a lack of trust in officers taking these men into battle, Jungle POWs' thoughts and opinions about the Vietnam War would undoubtedly be different.

The Jungle POW experience varied in other accounts from Hanoi POWs.

They did not undergo torture or interrogations to the extent of Hanoi POWs, nor did they need to establish a communications system. However, within their narratives, Jungle POWs praise many of the things the official story lauds in Hanoi POWs. These narratives describe numerous examples of camaraderie as men nourish and care for those who cannot care for themselves. Men credit their resilience and survival to the bonds of family that formed. And men who became de facto leaders supported those who became severely ill and could not work, taking on twice the work effort.

Thus, POWs within Jungle narratives represent many of the same virtues praised in the official story and Hanoi POW narratives. Moreover, the official story censors

Jungle POWs for actions and characteristics that are manifest within Hanoi POW narratives. Therefore, are the two groups of POWs more alike than historians and others have argued? Were there not acts of self-preservation on both sides? Were there not acts of courage and camaraderie in Hanoi and the Jungle? Was their performance in captivity as dissimilar as the official story claims?

In accordance with the Paris Peace accords, 565 American military and twenty-six civilian POWs returned home from Vietnam in 1973. Writing a history to encompass the 591 returning American POWs in addition to POWs that attained an early release during the war is a daunting task. These returnees represented ground force units in the Marines and Army, pilots from the Air Force and Navy, and civilians playing a variety of roles in Vietnam. Each circumstance varied within the general POW experience. Within North Vietnam, there were eleven different prison systems; four in Hanoi, six within fifty miles of the city, and one on the Chinese border. There were also numerous prison camps within South Vietnam and Laos that prisoners were regularly relocated to during their imprisonment. Within these camps or prisons that housed soldiers and civilians from various divisions of the armed forces, treatment differed substantially. Nonetheless, Hubbell systematically grouped together the four hundred plus pilots that were members of the Air Force and Navy into one group while also placing the enlisted men who were predominantly from the Army and Marines into another.

Howes, on the other hand, demonstrates the variety of POWs and their experiences within his book, *Voices of the Vietnam POWs*, which is largely based on a significant range of memoirs and autobiographies from POWs that accumulated in great numbers in the twenty-plus years since the POW release and Hubbell's publication. With

the diverse experiences depicted in *Voices of the Vietnam POWs*, Howes reveals the artificial construction of history within Hubbell's book, which although based upon two hundred interviews conducted by Hubbell and his staff, presents no bibliography, and clearly stresses some aspects of the story more than others.

The POWs I have chosen to look at represent men from varying divisions of the armed forces, held in both North and South Vietnam, and deliver different depictions of their lives as POWs. Hanoi POWs referenced are Eugene McDaniel, Jay Jensen, Ralph Gaither, and John McGrath. They were all pilots who were captured in 1966-1967 and spent the duration of their captivity within prisons in Hanoi. These men have also written autobiographical books about their POW experiences. Two additional pilots, Paul Galanti, and Ken Cordier, who also spent six years each in Hanoi prisons, were interviewed for this paper. Jungle POWs have less frequently published autobiographical accounts. Nonetheless, Frank Anton and John Daly, two POWs within the Kushner POW Camp, a Jungle POW camp named after its highest ranking officer, Floyd Kushner, published narrative accounts. Additionally, Zalin Grant compiled a book of eight accounts of Jungle POWs held within the Kushner camp and one Pilot POW captured in Laos who was later in close contact with the POWs in Hanoi. POWs cited in this source are Pilot POW, Theodore Guy, and Jungle POWs, John Young, Tom Davis, Ike McMillan, James Daly, Willy Watkins, Jim Strickland, Frank Anton, and David Harker. These accounts demonstrate the group's collective experience within the jungle as well as individual aspects each POW chose to discuss. Finally, John Dramesi, a Hanoi POW, also wrote an autobiography about the POW experience, but took a far different stance in

portraying the lives of his fellow POWs. These POWs' narratives, combined with secondary literature, have formed the basis for my argument and conclusions

POW narratives demonstrate varying views on the Vietnam War. Preconceived notions of the Vietnam War, the Vietnamese, and communism are evident in addition to their experiences as soldiers in the war and experience as POWs. For most POWs in Hanoi and the jungle, conveying thoughts and feelings about the Vietnam conflict as a whole are tied directly to their motivations in writing. For the Hanoi POWs, a major goal of their narrative lies within defending American involvement in a war that these men continued to fight within prison walls despite the unfavorable end result and declining approval of the American people. Consequently, through legitimizing the war effort in narratives, POWs are able to demonstrate that their personal efforts as pilots fighting the war and resisting when captured continued to be for an honorable, patriotic cause, and not in vain. Thus, their justifications rely on declarations that either the South Vietnamese desired to remain free from communism, or defending against the spread of communism in order to maintain a free world. However, rationale for such justifications often lacks substantiating facts regarding communism and the Vietnam War.

Jay Jensen, a pilot from Utah, begins his narrative by pondering his efforts as a pilot and the danger involved within this position. He explains why he continued to fight despite the risks of either being killed in action or being taken captive claiming, "I knew the North Vietnamese communists were trying to take over all Vietnam. I knew there were millions of South Vietnamese who didn't want to live under communism."<sup>6</sup> Jensen has linked his fighting and the United States involvement to a positive purpose. He is

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<sup>6</sup> Jay R. Jensen, *Six Years in Hell: A Returned Vietnam POW Views Captivity, Country, and the Nation's Future* (Bountiful, UT: Horizon Publications, 1974), 14.

fighting to make sure free people stay free from the evils of communism. Ironically, in looking at POW attitudes on the war, and in particular, the Hanoi POWs, there is a fundamental lack of knowledge or experience underpinning their beliefs which becomes evident within their narratives. Jensen, for example, was stationed and flew missions out of Korat, Thailand and did not set foot in Vietnam until he was shot down. Moreover, he never was in South Vietnam and most likely had little or no exposure to the South Vietnamese or ARVN troops. Before being shot down, Jensen describes days of playing tennis, eating buffet food, and buying gifts for himself and family in between missions rather than depicting this grueling struggle for freedom. Therefore, it appears that his only basis for stating there were millions of people wishing to remain free from communist aggression was based on American Cold War ideology. Theodore Guy, a high ranking pilot whose story is presented as a part of Grant's compilation, *Survivors*, demonstrates a similar thought process within his own accounts, revealing "I didn't consider myself very knowledgeable about the country," and "I didn't know the South Vietnamese." However, like Jensen, he is still able to render opinions on United States involvement, asserting "They were an underdeveloped nation who needed our help"<sup>7</sup> These men advocate the righteous cause of American interaction in Vietnam even while admitting to know nothing about the country. Paul Galanti, in a recent interview, indicates his lack of knowledge about Vietnam and the Vietnamese people. When asked about Vietnam, Galanti sarcastically responds, "I did not even know what it is called. I knew it was Indochina."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ted Guy in Zalin Grant, compiler, *Survivors* (New York: Norton, 1975), 257.

<sup>8</sup> Paul Galanti, interview by Ryan Frost, November 2004.

Other Hanoi POWs were not as optimistic about the South Vietnamese alleged desire for freedom and the United States desire to protect free countries. Eugene McDaniel, believing the United States was right to be in Vietnam in order to contain communist aggression, wrote “even if South Vietnam didn’t particularly care about whether democracy or a dictatorship ruled their lives, the point was the United States was trying to draw the line for the free world.”<sup>9</sup> McDaniel presents a more sensible portrayal of the United States rationale for being in Vietnam. Pilots were not merely sent to Vietnam to secure the liberty of the South Vietnamese, but to prevent communism from sweeping into their political system. Despite McDaniel’s validation, he also does not articulate any knowledge about Vietnam and the Vietnamese of North or South Vietnam. Thus, he does little to explain how this specific conflict with Vietnam would fit within the overall framework of Cold War containment policy and clarify why this specific conflict was about communism as opposed to a war of independence as the North Vietnamese argue. Likewise, Ken Cordier, who in a recent interview also admitted to being virtually ignorant about the Vietnamese, states this war was about communism and “we were not going to let them take Southeast Asia.”<sup>10</sup>

Instead of evidentiary support, McDaniel and other pilots base their defense on a trust in leadership that proclaimed this containment policy relevant to Vietnam. Although McDaniel’s narrative expresses uncertainty about the war and whether the usage of crippling force was having its intended effect, the heavy price paid on both sides, and the South Vietnamese loss of faith in American efforts, he maintains, “we

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<sup>9</sup> Eugene B. McDaniel with James. L. Johnson, *Scars and Stripes: The True Story of Man’s Courage in Facing Death as a Vietnam POW* (Irvine, CA: Harvest House Pub., 1975), 16.

<sup>10</sup> Ken Cordier, interview by Ryan Frost, November 2004.



believed in our Commanders, our president, and in the cause, no matter how marginal or confusing at times.”<sup>11</sup>

Moreover, in continuing to look at the war and the destruction coming with a crippling use of force, Hanoi POWs justified their individual efforts as a part of the bombings. Their captors called them criminals and the POWs had to accept that civilians were inevitably killed, albeit unintentionally. For these casualties to occur, they had to provide justifications not only for a greater good, but with a heavy heart, demonstrating that the United States went to war only when all other options for a peaceful resolution were exhausted. A typical strategy within narratives was for the POW to ask tough moral questions and weigh the difficult options. For example, Jensen questions whether it was right to be in Vietnam and responds by morally justifying the bombings, answering, “we were there to stop communism, by force, by war, because all other ways of peaceful means of preserving this freedom had failed.”<sup>12</sup> Jensen’s generalized statement is a common truism found within Hanoi POW narratives. Jensen and other POWs admitted to knowing little or nothing about Vietnam and its people. They further demonstrated this ignorance by failing to provide any evidence that would suggest this war was a tool of Cold War communist aggression. Nonetheless, these POWs still maintained they knew America was justified to be involved in war and Hanoi narratives continually present opinions without historical details or support in order to corroborate such views that would give Americans some sense of moral authority in fighting.

Furthermore, by justifying the war, albeit without evidence or historical basis, Hanoi POWs were able to further address their own struggles and risks involved in this

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<sup>11</sup> McDaniel, 16.

<sup>12</sup> Jensen, 15.

defense of freedom. Before being shot down, Ralph Gaither considered the tremendous responsibility involved in handling devastating weapons of war and the perils each pilot faced going into battle. He wrote in his journal, "I live each day for this country. I wonder as I work, live, pray, and see my buddies die whether this country realizes we exist for them....What I do is that which must be done for our freedom."<sup>13</sup> Not only are Gaither, Jensen, and others able to rationalize the bombings, but their assessment demonstrates the idea that Americans should be grateful for their service and sacrifice that served towards protecting the concept of freedom. Thus, their justification for the war shifts from historical evidence concerning the conflict, to their individual experiences which depict men struggling within the domain of a merciless enemy. By demonstrating the cruel nature of torture, to which their Vietnamese captors are repeatedly referred to as savage animals, continually barking commands and sadistically torturing the POWs, they attempt to affirm the righteous struggle pilots committed themselves to in fighting against evil communists.

Jungle POWs also revealed motivations with their descriptions of the American war effort in North and South Vietnam. However, unlike pilots who justified war efforts in order to show their experience was not in vain, Jungle POWs discredit the notion that men were serving in this war for an honorable purpose. Jungle POWs' intention in questioning the American war effort within their narratives is partially tied to their performance as POWs. Of the twenty-four men within the Kushner Camp, a Jungle POW camp that Hubbell used to compare Jungle POW performance to Hanoi POWs and Grant included within his *Survivors*, ten died, two were released while being held in South Vietnam, and two became a part of the Peace Committee, a group of POWs in

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<sup>13</sup> Ralph Gaither, *With God in a POW Camp* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1973), 15.

Hanoi that cooperated with the North Vietnamese. Of the remaining survivors, almost all felt it futile in resisting their captors' demands, albeit infrequent, to make tapes or sign confessions used for propaganda. Because of this questionable service record that continued in Hanoi, Ted Guy, a pilot who eventually brought charges against the two Peace Committee members, along with other Hanoi pilots, who by this time were not undergoing frequent or brutal exploitation attempts, began criticizing the Jungle POWs. Upon coming home, these Jungle POWs were depicted in a less than favorable light by pilots. Within their narratives, Jungle POWs demonstrate the cruel nature of American warfare as one of the reasons that inevitably impacted their lack of resistance and views of futility concerning the war and resistance, while also countering the generalized views Hanoi POWs proclaimed that forced them to continue the honorable war effort. However, despite the reasoning that led these men to view the Vietnam War unfavorably, Jungle narratives go on to explain their questionable performance in captivity and defend any actions that came under attack within the official story.

As indicated, Pilot POWs' justifications for war come largely without observing the Vietnam War closely, except what they could see from over a thousand feet in the air. The Jungle POWs' experiences in the war and their exposure to various facets of the struggle were highly different. Nevertheless, they came into Vietnam possessing the same amount of ignorance as the pilots. Jungle POW, John Young, a U.S. Special Forces and Weapons specialist, admits that when he arrived in Vietnam, he "knew little about Viet Nam or why we were there." He knew that it had to do with communism, but he could not give communism a good definition, just that it was "something bad, something

we had to fight against.”<sup>14</sup> The view that communism was “something bad” and something that had to be contained, without putting Vietnam into context, sounds remarkably similar to some of the Pilot POWs’ bald statements.

The exposure of Jungle POWs to warfare on the ground and to the South Vietnamese people, even before capture, caused their thoughts about the validity of this fight to change dramatically. Jungle POWs often found themselves with feelings of futility concerning resistance to making tapes and to antiwar appeals that essentially confirmed what they had previously witnessed in Vietnam. Moreover, in dire circumstances where resistance could signify death, some Jungle POWs cooperated with little or no resistance. Because of this cooperation and lack of conviction in the war effort that was witnessed by Pilot POWs after Jungle POWs were relocated to Hanoi, the official story has condemned their service record and categorized this group collectively to fit the negative examples of service the Hanoi POWs perceived.

Thus, one goal for Jungle POWs in explaining their performance in captivity and lack of faith in the American war effort involved presenting the war itself. Within his introduction, Frank Anton, an enlisted helicopter pilot and Jungle POW, introduces the Vietnam War and his attitudes about the Viet Cong and the South Vietnamese: “Allies were often unreliable, and our enemy was maddeningly invisible, cunning, and deadly.”<sup>15</sup> From the beginning of his account, Anton is able to demonstrate the character of two distinct Vietnamese sides. There are the resilient enemies in the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese Army who restlessly and courageously fight as a united front with the peoples’ support. And there are the American allies, the ARVN, who do little to protect

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<sup>14</sup> John Young in Grant, 210.

<sup>15</sup> Frank Anton with Tommy Denton, *Why Didn't You Get Me Out?* (Arlington, TX: Summit Publishing Group, 1997,) ix.

their country, and the South Vietnamese people, who appear to loathe American presence and the destruction that comes with it.

Unlike Hanoi POWs, who were exposed to their enemy only within prison walls, Jungle POWs traveled throughout South Vietnam to various camps and eventually all the way up the Ho Chi Minh Trail to Hanoi, seeing people from different walks of life supporting the war. It was through these experiences in Vietnam in which Jungle POWs were exposed to the people involved in the war effort on both sides that rendered them able to assess American involvement more clearly. For example, Anton on the trail northward sees ARVN soldiers being issued packs of weapons from the North Vietnamese Army after switching sides. He writes: "This was the story of that stupid war. The people we went to help to save their country could switch and fight for the other side and not miss a lick."<sup>16</sup> John Daly, another enlisted Jungle POW who witnessed South Vietnamese crossing over learned that "many had crossed over on their own, that they had no real concern for winning the war."<sup>17</sup> Jungle POW narratives counter some of the assertions within the Hanoi POW experience that Americans fought because the people in South Vietnam wanted to be free. Pilot POW Guy "felt very strongly that as long as anyone wanted to be free, regardless of their race, creed, or color, the U.S. ought to help."<sup>18</sup> Anton, Daly, and other Jungle POWs are better able to assess their viewpoints and opinions concerning the absurdity of the war, conveying evidence to their beliefs, unlike the pilots who cite United States policy.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>17</sup> James A. Daly and Lee Bergman, *A Hero's Welcome: The Conscience of Sergeant James Daly Versus the United States Army* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1975), 165.

<sup>18</sup> Ted Guy in Grant, 258.

Additionally, the Jungle POW march to Hanoi in 1970 and other experiences depicted in narratives demonstrate the resilience of the Vietnamese and establish a human side to the war often neglected by Hanoi POWs who write about the war against communism and fail to evaluate what the Vietnamese believed they were fighting for. Anton witnessed trucks and bulldozers rapidly repairing craters blown by American bombs along the Ho Chi Minh trail, a vital transportation and supply line, and looked on in “awe at the persistence and ingenuity of the Vietnamese who somehow kept that road open so that they could keep fighting that war.”<sup>19</sup> Tom Davis, another Jungle POW recalled, “the U.S. had bombed the road that day and the machine was repairing it the same night. The process would be repeated the next day. The Vietnamese had tenacity-- you had to hand them that.”<sup>20</sup> After being captured, Davis saw “a number of female soldiers were in the area. Some were armed and others were bumpers carrying oil, ammo, and food to the front.”<sup>21</sup> Thus, Jungle POWs depict the popular support and will the South Vietnamese and North Vietnamese possessed in supporting the war effort. By juxtaposing this steadfast will of the enemy to the ARVN who were often portrayed as worthless soldiers, changing sides with little regard to the result, Jungle POWs are able to suggest legitimacy in the North Vietnamese cause, while also demonstrating the futility of American involvement.

Akin to Hanoi POWs who levied their dedication in defending freedom for the South Vietnamese from communism, Jungle POW narratives demonstrate the devotion of the Vietnamese in defending their country. Unlike Hanoi narratives, however, which demonstrate few characteristics of the war, Jungle narratives assess why the North and

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<sup>19</sup> Anton, 112.

<sup>20</sup> Tom Davis in Grant, 239.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 105.

South Vietnamese were committed to protecting their country from American intervention. Continually motivated to demonstrate the absurd quality of war and defend their lack of resistance and will to support the war, Jungle POWs provide evidentiary support to explain what led the South Vietnamese to hate American involvement and even switch sides in the war. Their assessments also demonstrate what led these POWs to become more sympathetic to the Vietnamese cause and even confront the American war effort by refusing to accept pilot authority in Hanoi that insisted the Jungle POWs continue resisting.

John Daly undoubtedly had a goal in describing the cruelties of the Vietnam War that led to his soul-searching decision to join the Peace Committee and openly cooperate with the Vietnamese. Daly explains that the basis for his decision lay within his conscience and what he directly witnessed in Vietnam. Similarly to Anton, he writes “one thing I sensed immediately that disturbed me a lot was how most of the Vietnamese people resented our being there, acting like policemen.”<sup>22</sup> His experience provided rationale for his own decision to no longer attempt to support America’s mission in Vietnam while being a POW, and ultimately even become a part of the antiwar movement within his cell.

Daly and others Jungle POWs describe the cruel, and often chaotic and unsophisticated nature of American warfare. There were entire villages within South Vietnam that supported Ho Chi Minh’s bid for a United Vietnam, making it almost impossible to distinguish who was a possible enemy or an ordinary South Vietnamese civilian. Thus, Jungle POWs clarify why the army employed a strategy of Search and Destroy, in which soldiers sat about to find Vietcong or VC sympathizers and kill them.

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<sup>22</sup> Daly, 52.

Daly describes the cruel nature of Search and Destroy by revealing that a kill earned three days off which ultimately led to mistakes because “it didn’t seem to matter why or who-- just as long as he was Vietnamese and dead.”<sup>23</sup> Similarly, Anton, a helicopter pilot, discloses that he “knew of a couple of pilots who would have blasted a village without being fired upon first.... Their attitude was that all the Vietnamese should be wiped out.”<sup>24</sup> Since American soldiers treated the Vietnamese like they had little or no value, it was not surprising they loathed American presence. Examples of American cruelty are a constant presence within Jungle POWS narratives before their capture. David Harker, another Jungle POW whose account is in *Survivors*, was horrified by his experiences as a soldier and describes an incident in which a man being asked for his ID card started complaining about how he had a wife and family, and, “some of the GIs got pissed and knocked his teeth out, then took him in for interrogation as a VC suspect.”<sup>25</sup>

Moreover, these instances of barbarism within Jungle narratives were not isolated to the battlefield or Search and Destroy missions but existed in civilian hamlets and villages of South Vietnam. Daly describes soldiers treating average women on the streets like prostitutes by squeezing and pinching them, defending themselves by saying these women were “all nothin’ but VC boom girls.”<sup>26</sup> Ike McMillan, a black Jungle POW whose story appears in *Survivors*, depicts military personnel treating Vietnamese women like lesser human beings, recalling a Sergeant who “couldn’t keep his hands off the giggling Vietnamese girls.”<sup>27</sup> Not only was American presence and the resultant

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>24</sup> Frank Anton in Grant, 51.

<sup>25</sup> David Harker in Grant, 79.

<sup>26</sup> Daly, 57.

<sup>27</sup> Ike McMillan in Grant, 69.



destruction described as unwanted and cruel, but thoroughly degrading as American soldiers attempted to turn South Vietnam into a brothel with little or no military discipline. Harker, after witnessing a fellow soldier tease an old man and attempt to take advantage of a thirteen-year-old girl, sums up the American experience in South Vietnam by stating, “put a man in anonymous uniform and give him a weapon, send him to a country he holds in contempt out of ignorance, and he sometimes acts like an animal.”<sup>28</sup>

Both the Hanoi and Jungle POWs had agendas within their narratives in discussing the war. Ironically, the Jungle POWs, who have been described as undereducated compared to Pilot POWs, seem to possess a greater degree of knowledge about various elements of the Vietnam War compared to the college educated, career soldiers interned in Hanoi. The Hanoi POWs lay claim to believe in and to support the war. Regardless of the basis behind these beliefs, they criticized Jungle POWs for their lack of resistance and faith in the war effort. Nonetheless their performance as POWs *unquestionably* should be remarkably different from the performance of Jungle POWs.

James Stockdale, a senior ranking POW imprisoned in Hanoi, lauded by Hubbell as an example of heroism and leadership, wrote, “For Americans who became POWs in North Vietnam, capture meant not that they had been neutralized on the war’s sidelines, but that for them a different kind of war had begun--the war of propaganda.”<sup>29</sup> Because these men believed in the war effort, and knew the possibility of becoming tools of propaganda, they would continue fighting the enemy even while imprisoned.

Additionally, Stockdale places the POWs directly at the core of the Vietnam conflict,

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<sup>28</sup> David Harker in Grant, 13.

<sup>29</sup> James B. Stockdale, foreword in *Prisoner of War: Six Years in Hanoi*, by John M. McGrath (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1975), vi.

disclosing, “propaganda was their main source of weapon against the U.S,”<sup>30</sup> and the POWs were the top billing of this theatrical production. If using the POWs as a source of propaganda was the pipeline to victory for the North Vietnamese, it was imperative for the POWs, who denied losing faith in the righteous cause of this war, to continue fighting within prison walls and resist their enemy by any and all means. Whether the enemy wanted a confession or for a POW to bow in order to obtain toilet paper, Ralph Gaither writes, “holding out was the name of the game.”<sup>31</sup>

The official story and Hanoi narratives laud heroic acts of resistance in which Hanoi POWs endured torture rather than divulge military information or allow themselves to be used for propaganda. The official story and Hanoi narratives laud camaraderie that enabled these men to nurse, feed, and emotionally care for each other under tremendous strain and preserve the means of resistance. The official story and Hanoi narratives laud military discipline that enabled leaders to take charge and keep the group resisting as a unit even while men had moments of doubt, thereby sustaining morale. The official story and Hanoi narratives laud the faith in America these men possessed that empowered them to keep serving this country within the virtuous military effort of Vietnam. Most importantly, the official story and Hanoi narratives hail POWs resistance efforts as one of the most important aspects of the war and defeat of the Vietnamese. Within their narratives, examples of these merits are prevalent. However, Hanoi narratives also divulge numerous examples that contradict these noble characteristics, breaking the idea of unanimity among the POWs that the official story seeks to convey.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Gaither, 46.

Nonetheless, because Hanoi POW narratives are often motivated within the official story to defend their actions and uphold ideals of patriotism, POWs sought to display personal and group acts of resistance. Jensen portrays the limits of resistance by describing a torture session, writing, "If I had to give my arms to preserve my silence to keep the Code of Conduct, then it was worth it."<sup>32</sup> Gaither recalls his arms were "jerked behind me and handcuffs were snapped onto my wrists, the jaws forced tight until the skin puffed upon both sides of the steel."<sup>33</sup> When a gun was put to his head, he continued to resist, refusing to answer questions. The Hanoi narratives indicate that these men would suffer through torture until death in the name of resistance before divulging information

However, under extreme circumstances, even the most die-hard resisters eventually gave in to torture despite misleading statements in their books that convey the idea that men would rather die than be dishonored. Thus, descriptions of torture are used primarily to defend the actions of Hanoi POWs who eventually did give information or became sources of propaganda (in contrast to Jungle POWs who describe the cruel and chaotic war effort.) John McGrath's narrative, *Prisoner of War: Six Years in Hanoi*, focuses on depicting the brutal trials Hanoi POWs sustained before giving any information. McGrath, a Hanoi POW who largely focuses on the hardships of captivity, illustrates penciled drawings from memory tortures involving ropes, leg clamps, manacles, and beatings, and concludes, "words alone are not sufficient to convey the experience."<sup>34</sup> McGrath and some other POWs present the idea that the majority of men

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<sup>32</sup> Jensen, 42.

<sup>33</sup> Gaither, 21.

<sup>34</sup> John M. McGrath, *Prisoner of War: Six Years in Hanoi* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1975), ix.

took torture to extremes. James Stockdale writes in McGrath's introduction, these graphic drawings represent the "way of life that the overwhelming majority of American Airmen chose in preference to being pawns on the propaganda front."<sup>35</sup> Within most Hanoi narratives, these former POWs present the idea that almost all men coped with extreme brutality in the name of resistance before finally giving up information or succumbing to Vietnamese demands.

Since the war progressed into prison camps for these Pilot POWs, interrogation rooms and torture sessions became the new battleground. In order to endure torture and continue to resist, great lengths of camaraderie would be necessary to provide physical and mental support through many years of trials. Thus, within narratives, resistance and torture are often bound with the ideals of camaraderie and its important element of communication.

Men who experienced torture eventually broke. Although these men had little choice but to give information when pushed to the limits of pain or death, many were despondent over giving in and display extreme guilt. Jay Jensen writes his greatest concern was "that I would be forced to give information, or make statements that might embarrass my country or make me look like a traitor."<sup>36</sup> Ralph Gaither, after giving in and signing a confession stating, "I admitted to being a criminal....I believed the war in Vietnam was illegal, immoral, and unjust," writes, "Do you think it was easy to write words like that, even after torture beyond endurance? Even now my heart screams out in protest."<sup>37</sup> Additionally, with each day away from their families and country, in the most perilous of places, depression sank further into these men and the resolve to continue

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<sup>35</sup> Stockdale, vi.

<sup>36</sup> Jensen, 65.

<sup>37</sup> Gaither, 72.

resisting often staggered. Thus, narratives depict how these men came together as a group, despite being unable to see each other, through an extensive communications system involving taps in order to sustain morale and encourage each other during such trying moments of doubt and pain. This communications system is used within the official story to demonstrate the varied form of resistance and camaraderie exhibited by Hanoi POWs in comparison to Jungle POWs who did not go to such lengths to continue resisting.

McGrath declares, "Communications were the lifelines of our camp organization." It was essential to know what was happening within the camp, such as a fellow prisoner's torture, and to lend a "friendly word of encouragement to a disheartened fellow POW."<sup>38</sup> Since communication was the lifeline in the camp and, according to Jensen, "vital to morale,"<sup>39</sup> POWs took great personal risks in communicating and spreading the tap code to those involved in the camp. Being caught involved the prospect of being interrogated and subsequently tortured for an oral apology, a propaganda tape, a written confession or an antiwar appeal. McDaniel reiterates the tremendous risk taken in the name of camaraderie and morale, writing that Gaither and another man, who gave him the tap code, "spent seventeen days in torture for their part in that."<sup>40</sup> Thus, McDaniel and other POWS demonstrate the extent these POWs were willing to go in order to provide their fellow soldiers with the best means of resistance.

Moreover, communication was intertwined with the actual means of resistance and the continuing war within the camp. McDaniel and others repeatedly describe the interrogation room and tortures as the battleground in which POWs continued to fight. If

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<sup>38</sup> McGrath, 34.

<sup>39</sup> Jensen, 56.

<sup>40</sup> McDaniel, 46.

Stockdale's assessment of the importance of POWs to the enemy is accurate, then according to McDaniel, it was "imperative to communicate in order to know what others were going through in torture so the rest of us could be prepared for the exact question and the exact kind of torture we were to receive."<sup>41</sup> Without the communication that was achieved via tremendous risks of camaraderie, there would be little hope in resisting effectively, and this war from within would be lost.

Furthermore, Hanoi POWs are able to legitimize the importance of communication and its correlation to the war effort inside by writing that one of the "keys to morale was to beat the enemy as often as possible in their attempts to keep us isolated or to force us to yield to their commands."<sup>42</sup> Narratives set the stage for the prevailing war inside by demonstrating guards doing everything in their power to thwart POW efforts to stick together through the communications network and resist, thereby attempting to use them more effectively as propaganda.

Within narratives that display a sense of unanimity in efforts to resist and communicate, there are also points at which this perception is challenged by personal doubts. Jensen describes his steadfast will that would enable him to risk death before giving in and breaking the Code of Conduct, but then devotes an entire section to the policy of "falling back." In discussing the "fallback" policy, Jensen compares himself to other pilots who began answering questions, making tapes, and writing confessions. But within these tapes, confessions, statements, etc., Jensen and other men refused to give the Vietnamese anything useful by lying, exaggerating, or making up entire stories.<sup>43</sup> Paul Galanti relays a similar idea, stating the Vietnamese did not get anything useful out

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Jensen, 42.

of the POWs.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, Jensen confronts the vagueness within the Code of Conduct, a military document designed to regulate the actions of POWs if captured, by challenging some of its unclear articles, pertaining to resistance, asking, “What does it mean to ‘resist by all means.’ What does it mean to ‘evade answering questions to the utmost of my ability’--What is the utmost of your ability. Does that mean never? Does it mean after torture? How much torture? Threats of torture?”<sup>45</sup> With these questions, Jensen describes the varied forms of resistance that correspond with the unclear principles of the Code of Conduct. He writes that some men gave in only to torture, others gave in to threats of tortures, some did not make much effort to resist, and even a few collaborated. Furthermore, Jensen demonstrates the variety in resistance and the inability to keep track of others’ performances during interrogations, revealing that within solitary torture sessions, “you made your own decisions.”<sup>46</sup> It is difficult to grasp how much torture if any was sustained before these men all inevitably gave in, and Jensen’s initial diehard stance towards torture that he claimed ninety-percent of prisoners lived by, appears misleading and rationalized.

Although Jensen is vague in explaining to what degree he and others fell back by not providing specific examples, it is clear that almost all POWs not only gave information to their captors, but became sources of propaganda. Vietnamese guards exploited prisoners into making tapes that blared on the camp radio to weaken morale, writing confessions about their alleged war crimes, and making oral appeals to the antiwar movement. Nonetheless, Jensen’s narrative fragilely claims that the overwhelming majority of men experienced tortures before resisting and eventually

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<sup>44</sup> Galanti interview.

<sup>45</sup> Jensen, 80.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 81.

becoming tools of propaganda. Thus, some Hanoi narratives are often unclear to what extent this ideal of unanimity in resistance actually existed.

Eugene McDaniel, a Hanoi POW who has been lauded by POWS as one of the most important men within the communications network, and who underwent extreme torture for this central role in communicating, depicts a different story about resistance that counters to a certain degree the illusion of unanimity. Throughout his narrative, McDaniel demonstrates the weakening resolve of men and explains various reasons as to why men's resistance levels diminished over time. He describes a book of cartoons made by some Hanoi POWs that condemned American involvement in Vietnam and played up the "human and lenient" treatment their guards proclaimed. McDaniel reasons, "it was an unfortunate thing to do, but they did it in hopes of getting an early release from prison,"<sup>47</sup> demonstrating that not all POWs were firm in returning together, comparatively to some Jungle POWs who accepted early release. Moreover, he does not attempt to show that such instances were a rare occurrence. He writes that during the beautification period of 1969, in which conditions improved on various levels throughout the camp, POWs still gave in to the Vietnamese even with an absence of harsh interrogations. McDaniel recalls, "We knew that a few prisoners were cooperating--going downtown to Hanoi and giving statements to the American Antiwar Delegation who were visiting there."<sup>48</sup> Thus, prisoners were exploited in demonstrating to the world that conditions were better than they were in reality.

Furthermore, McDaniel portrays Hanoi as a place where morale and the determination to resist faltered significantly at times, which in turn hurt the morale of

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<sup>47</sup> McDaniel, 88.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 135.



other men. Over the camp radio, McDaniel heard “a couple of really bad antiwar statements that had been made by two other prisoners, and that didn’t help any”<sup>49</sup> referring to their all ready deteriorating morale that continued to decline when fellow prisoners were used to condemn the war effort. Contrary to examples of great courage that men have depicted through the taps system, McDaniel also “heard of prisoners who had softened up,” in conversations with other men via the communication’s network. McDaniel writes that because they softened up, he knew these POWs “had cooperated fully and made propaganda tapes.”<sup>50</sup> Thus, McDaniel indicates, without seeing these men, he was certain they made tapes because this was common when men softened up. Unfortunately because these men softened up and made tapes, guards would come back and continue to exploit these individuals. Although McDaniel was disappointed, he does not condemn these men as rare drifters from policy. Instead, like Jensen, he writes each man had different thresholds for pain and different attitudes about resistance.

Hanoi POW John Dramesi made accusations that a significant number of POWs submitted to the Vietnamese when put through even the smallest tests of resistance. Reminiscent of Jensen, Dramesi presents instances in which men rationalize about giving in. After hearing one man make a tape, he has the opportunity to speak with this POW. Much to his dismay, this POW stated he made the tape without resisting because he wanted his grandmother to know he was still alive, which Dramesi regarded as a typically poor excuse. In discussing other interrogations, Dramesi writes that men would give indirect answers to avoid torture that would in turn supply the Vietnamese with the essential information they wanted. Although similar to Jensen in divulging

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 74.

rationalization over resistance and the Code of Conduct, Dramesi condemns these soldiers and their familiar interrogation tactics: "It was fascinating to me the mental gymnastics a man went through to convince himself and others that he had not confessed any vital information."<sup>51</sup>

Similar to McDaniel's portrayal of the Vietnamese attempting successfully to propagandize prisoners, Dramesi conveys an attitude that men submitted easily to Vietnamese demands. For example, Dramesi refused to fill out a survey that would demonstrate the "humane and lenient" treatment the Vietnamese guards sought to express to the outside world. Dramesi refused, but writes that unfortunately "Someone would ask those questions and there would be others to supply the proper answers,"<sup>52</sup> indicating with certainty that it was not rare for POW to submit to exploitation. Propaganda would blare over the radio read aloud by prisoners. Dramesi, expressing the frequency with which POWs supplied themselves as propaganda tools, writes, "as usual, an American voice told of the righteousness of the North Vietnamese."<sup>53</sup>

Furthermore, through living with various people and hearing numerous stories, Dramesi reveals attitudes that contradict the official story. One roommate was told by three naval officers that their attitude was to do and say anything the North Vietnamese wanted "because it wouldn't hurt the US anyway."<sup>54</sup> Within the cell block next door to Dramesi, men refused to communicate when a guard was stationed outside their window. Dramesi recalls "So for the next year, twenty-four hours a day, they remained silent to

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<sup>51</sup> John Dramesi, *Code of Honor* (New York: Norton, 1975), 99.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 269.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

avoid being caught by that imaginary guard.”<sup>55</sup> Ultimately, Dramesi depicts a POW experience in which some men did actively resist, but a large number did little or nothing within the prison walls to avoid becoming propaganda to be used by the enemy.

POW narratives portray tremendous efforts of resistance. However, these narratives also demonstrate that ideas of resistance and continuing the war inside are not tantamount to the official story and POWs’ generalized claim of unanimity. Moreover, since the official story carefully selects and omits elements from the Hanoi POW experience and compares them to negative aspects of the Jungle POW experience, their contrasting ordeals appear manifestly different. However, like Hanoi POW narratives that reveal varying forms of resistance, Jungle narratives also delve into their individual performances within captivity and reveal countering arguments to the official story that generalizes their experiences. Although their personal accounts, backgrounds, and beliefs about the war are remarkably different, the authors of Hanoi and Jungle narratives demonstrate similar responses to resistance, camaraderie and discipline within a monstrously demanding physical and mental environment.

There are instances in which Jungle POWs are exploited for tapes and confessions, but Jungle narratives demonstrate that their South Vietnamese captors preferred exposing them to propaganda, rather than using them as a source of propaganda. Ironically, even while Jungle POWs found themselves indisputably within harsher surroundings compared to Hanoi POWs, in which they were forced to work to survive and endured diseases common to the jungle, there were far fewer instances of exploitation compared to the Hanoi POWs. Furthermore, not only are these instances of cooperation not as frequent as official story claims, Jungle narratives demonstrate that

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 79.

their cooperation was neither willing nor optional despite their negative ideas concerning the war. Their conditions dictated a life and death situation. Men were broken down by their surroundings and men did die. Men who did resist to small degrees were made examples and perished. Thus, resisting demands from the enemy, albeit rare, was not a feasible option because those who did, and experienced some form of torture, never recovered.

Moreover, when arriving in Hanoi within a prison camp that had become organized during the final years of imprisonment, their futile attitudes towards resistance that formed in the jungle came under scrutiny from Hanoi POW Ted Guy and other POWs, who were then currently living through an era in internment that went virtually free from interrogations and tortures. Yet, ironically, examples of the Kushner camp's cooperation within Hanoi, excluding the two members who became members of the Peace Committee, were remarkably similar to instances of Hanoi POW cooperation.

Jungle POWs are also motivated to defend their actions within their narratives by describing at great lengths the brutal conditions they found themselves under, in which survival is described as an accomplishment in itself. Experiences from interrogations to gathering food are retold as life and death situations from the moments these men are captured in the jungle. Furthermore, these experiences dictate that unlike Hanoi guards who attempted to exploit these men for propaganda, the South Vietnamese cared little whether these men lived or died, and thus little about continual exploitation. Upon capture, Frank Anton took a hardliner approach to interrogations, only giving name, rank, and serial number. In response, the guard "produced a U.S. issue forty-five caliber pistol" and said 'If you don't answer my questions, I'm going to kill you right here, right

now.”<sup>56</sup> The nature of interrogation in South Vietnam was clear. The South Vietnamese captors were not afraid of losing these men as forms of propaganda because they never were a major source of propaganda. Jungle POW David Harker was also determined to resist giving in during interrogation in order to prevent violating the Code of Conduct. But like Anton, he was convinced that he would be killed if he did not submit. Reminiscent of Jensen, Harker questions the vague nature of the Code of Conduct, writing, “How do you determine ability to ‘evade questions’ with a bayonet at your neck.”<sup>57</sup>

Death and sickness were a large part of the Jungle POW experience. Ten out of twenty-four men within the Kushner camp died, and others hovered at death’s door. It is common within Jungle narratives to juxtapose the details of their daily life to Hanoi daily life in order to demonstrate how ludicrous and physically impossible resistance seemed. Floyd Kushner, an army doctor and former Jungle POW describes the typical POW, “lost forty to fifty percent of his normal weight, shook and burned with malaria, defecated thirty to one hundred times a day because of acute and chronic dysentery, bled at the gums from scurvy, suffered intense pain from a swollen liver, spleen, and scrotum associated with malnutrition.”<sup>58</sup> Nonetheless, in discussing antiwar appeals and written confessions, Jungle POWs feel guilty just like Hanoi POWs, but reveal the risks involved in not cooperating when under such brutal conditions. Tom Davis begins his defense by writing, “We hated to see the VC bringing another appeal to us. Nobody wanted to sign.”<sup>59</sup> Then he goes on to speak about a few men their captors deemed difficult. Top

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<sup>56</sup> Anton, 34.

<sup>57</sup> David Harker in Grant, 57.

<sup>58</sup> Howes, 14.

<sup>59</sup> Tom Davis in Grant, 193.

Williams, the ranking Jungle POW, who also served in Korea, was made an example of for referring to the ARVN as the ARVN instead of puppet troops. Although, Williams was as “hard-core as they come,” he and another leader, Ike Eisenbraum, a special forces captain who Davis regarded as “one of the toughest guys who passed through our camp,” were both broken, and their will to resist and survive diminished shortly thereafter. Thus, Davis writes, “I thought it was a matter of survival.”<sup>60</sup>

Despite the fact that these men signed confessions or wrote antiwar appeals, they also applied certain ground rules to what they wrote. Harker states they refused to write about war crimes and condemn the war, even if many did not believe the war was just or worthwhile. Moreover, Harker writes, “We wrote and signed infrequent antiwar appeals. We could no longer see any purpose in resisting. It was a constant hassle, they were on our back, and not to may have gotten us thrown into the stocks.”<sup>61</sup> In this already decimated condition, in which men were sick, starving, and, furthermore, needed to be physically able to work for all future meals despite their condition, the risk of resisting and being put into stocks or broken in anyway like the other men that they witnessed dying, would undoubtedly amount to a death sentence. Ike McMillan sums up Jungle POW infrequent cooperation in these terms, “I didn’t think we had much choice.”<sup>62</sup>

Jungle POWs make no vague claims about resistance. They cooperated because they did not think there was any other option. Likewise, even the most hard line resisters in Hanoi inevitably cooperated because they also did not think there was a choice when death became a possibility upon refusal. However, when the Jungle POWs entered Hanoi and some continued cooperating at their new captors’ requests, Ted Guy and other POWs

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> David Harker in Grant, 192.

<sup>62</sup> Ike McMillan in Grant, 141.

within the Hanoi Plantation begin ordering them to stop. The Jungle POWs began to realize their new circumstances in which refusal to cooperate did not warrant death, but some chose to continue cooperating for a variety of reasons that were similar to Hanoi POW instances of cooperation.

The official story uses Jungle POW Floyd Kushner's broadcasts and Pilot POW Ted Guy's subsequent order to stop making tapes to demonstrate how the soft resistance of Jungle POWs improved when exposed to military discipline and leadership. Frank Anton's narrative, however, demonstrates a different idea about this official example. In describing Kushner's broadcasts, Anton writes "the camp staff kept prodding him to read the news over the prison interior, but he kept refusing." Kushner eventually did submit thinking he could get something for his cooperation. Nonetheless, he "made his delivery with a sense of humor,"<sup>63</sup> demonstrating that he was not a great source of propaganda. However, soon after, their cell was bombarded with messages in their defecation buckets saying "hold on" and "don't give them anything," which the official story credits for Kushner's halt in broadcasts. Ted Guy declares there was a big change in the Kushner camp after those messages were sent.

Anton jabs at Guy's claim that military discipline led these men to stop making tapes. He asserts that Kushner and other prisoners began to realize that torture and coercion had subsided and Kushner stopped on his own accord, reasoning, "Why should I do anything for them? They aren't doing anything for me or the rest of us"<sup>64</sup> Thus, Anton brings up that the Vietnamese promised benefits such as being able to write home or receive letters for making tapes. Kushner, who had a wife and two young children,

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<sup>63</sup> Anton, 126.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 128.

jumped at the opportunity to read the news in a sarcastic manner in order to write home. However, the Vietnamese were duplicitous and he stopped because he was not receiving the promised benefit of being able to write home.

Ironically, although Ted Guy, who lived in the same prison as these Jungle POWs, ordered these men and in particular Kushner to stop making tapes in an attempt to bring them under military discipline, Guy and other POWs fell victim to Vietnamese conniving efforts to trade tapes for letters or other benefits. Guy also read a chapter over the radio about the country of Vietnam on the condition that he could write home. He, too, was not permitted and affirms, "I knew I'd fallen for their lies."<sup>65</sup> This statement sounds remarkably similar to Kushner who claimed to stop making tapes when he realized he would not be punished and he would not benefit. It also sounds familiar to McDaniel's claims about men doing unfortunate things in the hopes of receiving special treatment. Furthermore, Anton claims that until Kushner read the news, he was not aware of any statement by the Jungle POWs being used for propaganda in Hanoi. Yet, after Guy passed the order not to present any programs, Anton confirms that a "couple of days later, he did one himself."<sup>66</sup> Hanoi POWs were continually exploited despite attempting to credit military discipline for their resistance. Should Guy credit military discipline and leadership for Jungle POW's refusing to make tapes, when under similar circumstances, Hanoi POWs did the same despite a military framework?

James Daly describes his conscience in cooperating to write tapes and join the Peace Committee, for which Guy would eventually file charges against him. Daly proclaims that he chose to join the Peace Committee in Hanoi on his own will because of

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<sup>65</sup> Ted Guy in Grant, 266.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 211.



his cruel experiences within the war as well as a propaganda course the Vietcong taught that Daly came to agree with. Thus, Daly decided to not only cease resisting, but eventually cooperate with antiwar appeals based upon his experiences as a soldier because he “was completely convinced that if there was any way to help end the war as a POW, it was by being a part of the Peace Committee.”<sup>67</sup> Throughout his book, Daly describes the brutality of war and the propaganda the Vietnamese presented about atrocities to be truthful based on his experiences.

It was not simply resistance that Jungle POWs defended within their narratives. The official story also criticized an overall breakdown in military discipline, and claimed that with the absence of leadership, these men not only ceased resisting and became sources of propaganda, but also turned on each other in a manner that contrasted the camaraderie and will of purpose that the Hanoi POWs possessed. Jungle narratives have explained why their ideas about the war prevented them holding on to some ideal about continuing to fight the war within a prison camp. Moreover, narratives depict leadership in a negative manner, often holding their superior officers responsible for leading them into an ambush, and leadership as a whole for taking these men into a war that appeared wrong and hopeless. According to Howes, leadership, at least not in the hierarchical military fashion, would not play a part in their resistance as a group or camaraderie and Jungle POW narratives explain why this would be the case.<sup>68</sup> Daly was abandoned in the middle of a mission. Jim Strickland, another Jungle POW complained, “the company commander wasn’t worth a damn. When the VC started firing he and his radioman took

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<sup>67</sup> Daly, 195.

<sup>68</sup> Howes, 211.

cover behind a dike.”<sup>69</sup> Upon arriving in POW camps, these men did not attempt to organize along military lines because of a general lack of trust in leadership.

Additionally, the Vietcong were able to prevent officers such as Anton and Kushner from attempting to create an organization within the camp. Anton states, “The VC warned us individually several times that if we did we would be punished.”<sup>70</sup> When conditions became harsh, the idea of any military discipline perished completely as the jungle’s effect took aim at certain members of the group regardless of rank.

Nonetheless, Jungle POWs continue to defend their performance as POWs by elaborating on the harsh conditions they found themselves in that prevented leadership, resistance, and camaraderie to prevail many times during their struggle. Although their narratives do not shy away from demonstrating the disintegration of humanity that occurs in the jungle, these POWs also portray acts of camaraderie and courage that sustained the group as a whole and led to their ultimate accomplishment of survival. Jungle narratives often contrast their experiences in the jungle to their later years in Hanoi in order to counter the official story’s portrayal that lauds one group based on one standard by comparing them to another group in an entirely different set of circumstances. Thus, a large motivation within these Jungle narratives is to prevent further trivializing of their experiences, by demonstrating the similarity in actions within varying circumstances.

Elaborating on Kushner’s description of life as a Jungle POW, Jungle narratives graphically depict the conditions in the jungle in comparison to Hanoi. Anton declares the Jungle POW experience “was a nightmare of hellish proportions that transformed civilized beings into primal animals struggling to cling to some fleeting sense of what it

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<sup>69</sup> Jim Strickland in Grant, 20.

<sup>70</sup> Frank Anton in Grant, 155.

means to be alive, and why.”<sup>71</sup> Throughout his account, men, including Anton, gave way to their savage sides, losing all essence of humanity. Why did this happen? Anton describes dysentery, filthy camp conditions, and small rations of rice, filled with rat droppings that decreased as the camp gained more occupants. Men had to share severely close quarters, often twelve to a bed, where dysentery flourished. But worst of all, within these horrid conditions, the men had to work very hard to survive. Thus, Jungle POWs attempt to distinguish themselves from Hanoi POWs, who were at least given food when their will to live wavered. In their already ravaged condition resulting from the effects of the jungle, these POWs had to work the fields to gather food, which is largely described as the greatest factor leading to the deterioration of camaraderie and humanity.

From their earliest experiences in the jungle, a breakdown in camaraderie and humanity seemed imminent. After being captured separately, Anton, Daly, and a few other new prisoners met several of their fellow POWs who had been in the Jungle for some time now at a ceremonial release feast for two POWs being sent home. Despite the promising prospect of release being dangled before them, they remarkably saw the effect of Jungle life and what eventually would unbelievably happen to them. Grisset and Sherman, two Jungle POWs who eventually succumbed to their surroundings, explained to these POWs to grab all the meat first, then eat the blood, and finally the fat, the latter two being conceivably inedible to the new POWs. But surely enough, Anton describes these men flailing their arms from one end of the table to the other, eating like animals, and not waiting for anyone to catch their breath or digest their food before devouring every last bit. Anton reflects, these “men were an indication of the effect that jungle captivity can have on men” and because the prospect of release was immediately dangled

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<sup>71</sup> Anton, 43.

before them, their selfish animal-like habits were a “sad preview of harrowing years that I could not foresee or prevent.”<sup>72</sup>

Grisset told the new men, “To survive you must live like an animal”<sup>73</sup> According to Davis, this was true: “We fought and carried on. We lived for a time like dogs.”<sup>74</sup> The primary reason for these men living in such a condition resulted from the required work necessary to survive upon entering the camp. Guards gave the POWs rice, but these small rations were not only not enough to live on, but decreased with the increase of prisoners, and often contained rat feces. Harker attests, “Besides lacking vitamins and proteins, the amount of rice we received didn’t begin to fill our stomachs, or give us enough strength to do the smallest tasks....To survive, we needed manioc, and it would be up to us to gather it.”<sup>75</sup> In order to survive, the guards would permit prisoners to go on what narratives refer to as manioc runs, in order to gather co’mi, a potato-like food native to the area.

Men, in groups of three or four would alternate hiking three or four hours to fields where this plant grew and load sixty pound baskets that each individual prisoner was responsible for. Manioc runs were daunting tasks when men were all ready beginning to experience the effects of sickness and hunger, but they were necessary for survival. If people became sick and could not go on the runs, someone else would have to gather manioc. Davis describes the strenuous nature of manioc runs and the frustration and resentment they created: “If a weak man went on a run you would have to pull yours and

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>73</sup> Frank Anton in Grant, 156.

<sup>74</sup> Tom Davis in Grant, 156.

<sup>75</sup> David Harker in Grant, 95.

probably his too,” and upon return men would find themselves “tired, sweaty, bruised, and cut, irritated with those who weren’t working hard enough.”<sup>76</sup>

Frustration over manioc runs grew because some men were more physically able to gather manioc, but nonetheless, men were able to successfully rotate manioc runs until sickness gained a stronger grasp on prisoners. It was at this time a skin disease began ravishing the men, POWS contracted malaria, and dysentery became worse and worse. Those men who were physically stronger and able to ward off deathly illnesses were burdened with frequent manioc runs which consequently took a toll on their mental and physical health. A great deal of resentment began to build within the men who were constantly working to feed the others who were sick and unable to work. According to Davis, in such a condition, “hunger takes over your body, dominates your mind,”<sup>77</sup> and stronger men started making claims that others were lazy or faking illness to avoid laboring through the fields. Harker admits to getting on POWs’ backs who were not working despite seeing how sick they were. The prevailing attitude in such a harsh situation was, “We were all sick. And sometimes you simply had to push yourself beyond your limitations.”<sup>78</sup> Although Anton declares “everyone at first tried to work” and men were “sicker than everybody realized,” Willie Watkins, the strongest man and de facto leader, instilled a “no work, no eat” policy because he believed the failure to pick manioc would result in starvation.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Tom Davis in Grant, 120.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> David Harker in Grant, 158.

<sup>79</sup> Frank Anton in Grant, 158

Self-preservation became the rule of life in the jungle. Harker states “things became competitive and petty”<sup>80</sup> as men stole pig fat from each other thinking it necessary for survival. Matters got worse when the Vietnamese split the current group of eighteen POWs into two groups of nine. During this split, Anton claims the “mental condition had begun to match our physical condition,”<sup>81</sup> and the two groups became almost like enemies, stealing food or firewood from each other. Davis writes, “some guys from one squad didn’t talk to the other while the split was on.”<sup>82</sup>

Jungle narratives do not attempt to conceal the brutal mindset that formed amidst the sickness and starvation of the jungle. Nor do narratives attempt to hide the consequences of men dying or deteriorating on account of hunger, disease, and a general lack of will to live through the horrors of daily life. However, Jungle narratives also demonstrate the great acts of camaraderie within this horror that eventually enabled some of these men to sustain each other as group and accomplish survival. Anton criticized Watkins for instilling a policy that hurt sick men who were unable to work, but nonetheless, concludes, “his ability to prevail over his own sickness and press others to do more to contribute to the well-being of the group of forcing many of us to keep on living.”<sup>83</sup> Watkins may have rebuked men, but he also gave encouragement and was always there to help a weaker man to the latrine or clean him up when he could not do it himself. The stronger men, even if resentful, supported others, often working twice as hard in order to ensure other POWs’ survival. Davis describes men being able to bounce back in order to help those who became sick and needed help to hold on: “Everybody

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<sup>80</sup> David Harker in Grant, 162.

<sup>81</sup> Frank Anton in Grant, 162.

<sup>82</sup> Tom Davis in Grant, 162.

<sup>83</sup> Anton, 55.

pitched in when someone was really down. Personal feelings were forgotten.”<sup>84</sup> When a man got to the point where death was imminent, the men would feed, clean, and nourish him until his death. Harker and Anton sat beside Grisset towards the end of his life as he cried for his mother.

These men faced problems and succumbed to emotions at times, but when conditions appeared desperate they were able to come together as a group. Anton states, “At the end of the war I told each man that I wanted to thank him because I knew that I’d made it through only because of his help.”<sup>85</sup> Harker proclaimed the bonds of camaraderie during this nightmare, recalling “We were beyond simple emotions of love or hate, forever joined by the most intimate exposure of our deepest selves, made brothers by that drive to survive when all seems lost.”<sup>86</sup>

Because Jungle narratives seek to demonstrate the harsh conditions in the Jungle compared to Hanoi, they often speak about their exuberance in exiting the jungle and entering the Hanoi prison system. Daly insists, “The only way I could ever describe how different Plantation Gardens were from all those POW camps in the South would be to say that it was like going from Hell to Heaven.”<sup>87</sup> Kushner compared the Hanoi Hilton to the Holiday Inn after experiencing the jungle. Nonetheless, despite these accounts, Howes writes, “The official story implicitly argues that they would have survived with honor and military bearing intact.”<sup>88</sup> Thus, the official story implicitly claims the Hanoi POWs would have organized and resisted no matter the circumstance. However, in looking back at the official story’s claims about resistance, there were ample examples

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<sup>84</sup> Tom Davis in Grant, 170.

<sup>85</sup> Frank Anton in Grant, 332.

<sup>86</sup> David Harker in Grant, 322.

<sup>87</sup> Daly, 174.

<sup>88</sup> Howes, 217.

that countered the idea that most men resisted to the best of their ability. Moreover, in looking at these men as a unit and sticking to the bonds of camaraderie within a communications system and a military organization, there were also examples that demonstrate breakdowns much like those experienced by the POWs within the far harsher jungle.

McDaniel, who cites the merits of camaraderie, gives numerous examples of occurrences that appear remarkably familiar to Jungle POWs. McDaniel largely attributes the breakdown in camaraderie to the same elements that caused a breakdown in discipline in the jungle. Food “was always a constant source of tension and frustration,”<sup>89</sup> and a “focal point for many instances of breakdown in discipline.”<sup>90</sup> The Vietnamese effectively used the anxiety created by food in order to create resentment among the prisoners. The Vietnamese would often give an extra ration to someone who appeared sickly. However, the Vietnamese would decide who would get this extra food which “would create a lot of tension with others in the room.”<sup>91</sup> McDaniel remembers, “men lowered to animals in stealing food for themselves, because the first law of preservation was to eat.”<sup>92</sup> McDaniel’s narrative demonstrates a clear similarity between pilots and Jungle POWs. When put in a situation in which hunger took over their minds and bodies, men lost discipline and were willing to hurt each other in order to preserve their own mental and physical health. Moreover, since the conditions in the jungle were even harsher, the laws of self-preservation took even a greater effect countering Hubbell’s theory concerning the breakdown of discipline.

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<sup>89</sup> McDaniel, 86.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 86.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.



McDaniel writes that these attitudes of resentment and self-preservation carried over into how fellow POWs treated those who were sick. He recalls, "Some men would always be the first to get the hot soup that came, denying others in the room who were sick and needed it more."<sup>93</sup> McDaniel goes on to describe various ailments the men began experiencing such as tapeworms and asthma. Although none of the prisoners within the Hanoi prison system reached the dire conditions experienced by Jungle POWs, he describes similar consequences. When one man in his room became very ill and was moved out by the Vietnamese presumably to be treated, McDaniel ponders, "maybe it was better for us that he was moved out, because sometimes the other men would vent their frustrations on a sick man, since the leaders in the room gave him preferential treatment with medicine and food."<sup>94</sup> Thus, men also turned on each other over food and became resentful of those receiving extra food which is similar to Jungle POWs receiving food without working. Nonetheless, under conditions in Hanoi where sickness and hunger became factors, Hanoi POWs were not forced to slave in the fields to attain food. Thus, if men in Hanoi quarreled and turned on each other, would these men not turn on each other in the Jungle under harsher conditions?

Additionally, confinement in itself proved tumultuous and at times led to breakdowns and fights. McDaniel recollects, "As time wore on, we found that confinement with each other over such long periods of time brought its own test, sometimes pushing us to the breaking point."<sup>95</sup> Gaither, in reference to his own roommate, writes "We got on each other's nerves at times to the point that we were ready swinging, often over some trivial detail like whether a Corvette or a TR-3 had the bigger

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 87.

seats.”<sup>96</sup> There was a lot of tension within Hanoi just as there was in the jungle, and military discipline and communication was unable to prevent such instances of conflict. Dramesi declares that men were not always looking after each other. When one of the men resisted, albeit in an unwise and off-color fashion, by screaming “Fuck Ho Chi Minh,” he was taken out of his cell and tortured. Nonetheless, “no one was willing to make an effort for an American, especially a crazy one,” as the men said that he deserved it. Dramesi describes this reoccurring trend, proclaiming, “Unity before self, I thought, hogwash.”<sup>97</sup>

There were great displays of camaraderie and resistance as well as actions of self-preservation within Hanoi. The Jungle POWs came together as a group in order to survive despite self-interested actions resulting from a merciless environment. If their experiences are similar in many aspects, why has history described their experiences so differently? The main reason lies within the creation of the official story that began within the Hanoi prison system during Camp Unity and later fermented with publications such as Hubbell’s after their release. Camp Unity refers to a prison system and period of time in which Hanoi POWs were brought together in large detention centers, and for the first time were able to discuss freely their experiences. It was during this time period that most of the dishonorable occurrences within the Hanoi prison system regarding resistance, communication, and self-preservation dissolved into one collective story that highlighted the honorable and courageous aspects of POW life. According to Howes, during this period, “with time and repetition, these moments had become embellished in

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<sup>96</sup> Gaither, 100.

<sup>97</sup> Dramesi, 219.

places, honed down in others until they were perfect tales, even if they bear little resemblance to what actually happened.”<sup>98</sup>

POW narratives have contradicted various facets of the official story regarding Hanoi POW performance. Furthermore, they also demonstrate how and why the official story was created and explain the perception of unanimity. Ralph Gaither writes about his entrance into Camp Unity in 1971, revealing “We discussed various aspects of our release so that we could conduct ourselves in the best possible military manner.” Although narratives do not explicitly say certain things will be left out, Gaither discloses, “We determined the kind of information each released prisoner should not discuss until all prisoners were released.”<sup>99</sup> The planning is evident within Camp Unity. McDaniel discusses the possibility of certain things occurring upon homecoming and how the men should handle these less than desirable aspects dealing with the antiwar movement and possible lack of support in Vietnam. When these men went home, they were on the same page and spoke highly about Nixon and each other’s courage and resistance through the ordeal.

The result of the official story is the perception of unanimity in experiences, attitudes, and beliefs. Not only was this idea perceived by the American people upon homecoming, but also by pilots who were shot down during the last months of captivity and observed the collective group. When asked about hostilities or differences between the POWs, Terry Gelonick, a 1972 shoot-down victim answered, “None that I was aware of at all....I was tremendously amazed at the organization and deep feelings--of comradeship--that the POWs had among themselves, particularly those that had been

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<sup>98</sup> Howes, 79.

<sup>99</sup> Gaither, 119.

there a long time.”<sup>100</sup> But in comparing various narrative accounts, this idea of unanimity is an illusion that was molded thoughtfully within these detention centers. Men clearly turned on each other at times in anger. Men stole food in their own self interest. Men refused to communicate out of fear. Men did not resist. Men were exploited in hopes of getting better treatment. And such examples were by no means anomalies to the Hanoi POW experience.

Only one Hanoi POW has been outspoken in denouncing this collective experience which highlighted a few experiences while significantly downplaying or completely eliminating others. John Dramesi, a hardliner, reveals aspects within Camp Unity that demonstrate its artificial nature. Many of the elements within Camp Unity that other POWs laud, Dramesi depicts in a different manner. Jensen describes that during the days of Camp Unity, leaders effectively instituted a fast in order to obtain medicine. Dramesi depicts a similar instance in which leaders did institute a fast to which men followed in varying degrees. He claims, “people began to be listless and a little more argumentative. Most just lay down and did nothing.”<sup>101</sup> The men did receive medicine, but it was the result of them yelling “poxy,” the Vietnamese word for doctor, and soon thereafter, the POWs admitted defeat by asking the guards for food and water.

Moreover, Dramesi describes men who had betrayed their country over the radio with little or no resistance reassuming their command positions. In a chapter sardonically entitled, *Return of the Prodigal*, Dramesi mocks other POW narratives and the idea of men being able to reclaim their honor after betraying their fellow men and country. He refers to Bob Schweitzer as a man who proclaimed over the radio that the Code of

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<sup>100</sup> Howes, 80.

<sup>101</sup> Dramesi, 211

Conduct was meaningless. In return for such comments, Dramesi considered him a guy who would be on the receiving end of a punch when they were united in Camp Unity. However, Schweitzer, a high ranking officer, had the men immediately listening as he began to discuss promotions and pay raises upon return that could be in jeopardy if their cooperation was exposed. Dramesi writes, “uppermost in the minds of his audience was not resistance but when they would receive their next promotion and how much was the last pay raise.”<sup>102</sup>

New attitudes emerged within Camp Unity. Instead of the men discussing how they could continue resisting the enemy, the “subject of this briefing was how we should conduct ourselves when faced with an interrogation by our own people after being released.”<sup>103</sup> Even more remarkably to Dramesi, the men were all listening attentively as they were being told “You don’t have to tell the US debriefers anything” and “if you do talk to them, make sure you have a good lawyer.”<sup>104</sup>

A “Forgive and Forget, Live and Let Live” attitude was born. Dramesi concludes the only reason such an attitude could prevail was if “you wanted the other person to forget what you had done.”<sup>105</sup> Because people were so attentive, there were a lot of people who obviously had done things that they wanted others to forget. Moreover, Camp Unity came to represent the motivations of the White House and Nixon in addition to POWS. Dick Stratton told Dramesi, “You’ll be surprised who the good soldiers will be. *Everybody’s* going to be a good soldier. And everybody will be so tired of the Vietnam War and the P.O.W. issue that the question of resistance won’t even be brought

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 238

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 240

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 241

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 240

up. We'll all be part of one big group.”<sup>106</sup> This appears to be the truth. The government planned to bring these men home with honor and amnesty over any possible infractions. Thus, distinctions between men were erased and examples that these narratives demonstrate as dishonorable or contradictory to the official story were largely forgotten.

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 258.

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